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Mobility and the international migration of young people: new models, new behaviours

Editorial

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Editorial

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- 1 In the academic literature, youth is considered a period of transition, between young childhood and adulthood, from immaturity to maturity, from innocence to awareness, from a state of dependence to one of independence. Those who have outgrown their infancy but have not yet reached adulthood constitute a distinct segment of the population with its own social, economic, demographic and cultural behaviours. They share a common position in society that goes beyond the values, beliefs and ways of living that typify what it is to “be young”.
- 2 However, the age parameters by which this stage in life is defined are themselves subject to the demographic, economic and socio-cultural changes that influence this period of transition. The situation changes from one country to the next depending on a range of historic circumstances, from the standard of the education system to the demand for workers in the job market and the particular nature of the transition from school to work. For young people, work has become intrinsically associated with the search for a better quality of life, a pursuit that frequently entails some form of mobility. Young people are therefore the age group with the greatest propensity to move away. They tend to have fewer family responsibilities and less attachment to the area they come from, but a stronger desire to build a better future. Since the beginning of the century, the mobility of young people has become an increasingly important area of interest in the social sciences. At the same time, the acceleration of technological progress has enabled a sequence of changes that, in turn, have had a powerful impact on the socio-economic and cultural structures of society. These shifts have had a more rapid and more intense effect on young people, who – by their very nature – are quicker to adopt any innovation that comes to hand and incorporate it into their everyday practices.
- 3 Human mobility – specifically the mobility of young people – has been central to the research activities of the Commission on Global Change and Human Mobility (GLOBILITY) set up by the International Geographical Union (IGU) in 2000 (<http://www.globility.org/>). Since then, GLOBILITY has organised dozens of international conferences and is responsible for the publication of numerous books, special periodical issues and articles in academic journals. These endeavours have themselves provided opportunities for new

research initiatives that have attracted funding at a national and international level, such as the *Youth mobility: Maximising opportunities for individuals, labour markets and regions in Europe* project (YMOBILITY), which was financed by the European Commission as part of the HORIZON 2020 programme (<http://www.ymobility.eu/>). The contributions presented in this issue are all but one based on work carried out in the context of GLOBILITY and YMOBILITY. The YMOBILITY project considers “young people” to be those aged from 16 to 35. This range has enabled the researchers to carry out valuable comparative analysis of the different stages of the transition from childhood to adulthood, as it includes a pre-transition phase, a critical phase in which the individual completes his or her education and starts a family, and a post-transition phase.

- 4 This topical issue marks another milestone for the GLOBILITY commission, following its previous BELGEO issue of 2005 (no. 1-2, <https://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/12388>), which became a benchmark for academics working in this field around the start of the millennium. Following just over a decade later, this second issue focuses one of the main components of human mobility today. It is young people that we witness moving in such great numbers within the EU. The people who arrive at the borders of the European Union, United States and other wealthy countries, are – for the most part – still young.
- 5 The title of this BELGEO issue – “Mobility and the international migration of young people: new models, new behaviours” – is directed at academics with an interest in youth and human mobility, two closely correlated concepts that have yielded a range of contributions on related themes and aspects of geography. These are arranged in three sections: the first is concerned with the economic, psychological and cultural considerations and aspects of regional development that play a role in young people’s decisions about migration, drawing on data from Spain, France, Italy and Latvia. The issues covered range from the effects of the economic crisis on migration decisions and the way adolescents perceive the areas that most appeal to them, to the way regional differences influence young people’s decision to emigrate, and the elements that constitute well-being in a particular place of residence (thereby slowing the process of mobility).
- 6 The second and third sections feature contributions that look at young people who arrive in the EU from Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil and Ecuador. Sensing that they will never realise their aspirations in their native country, young Algerians follow the migrant path to France. Yet, in doing so, they contribute to the intellectual impoverishment of their homeland. Disguised in the migration of young Bangladeshis to Italy is a wider scheme, in which leave to remain granted in Italy offers the opportunity to settle in another part of the EU, specifically in London, which was the target all along. Inevitably, however, the members of this community have to pass some time in Rome, settling in as best they can, even if they are already beginning to make new plans, following – with some trepidation – developments in the BREXIT negotiations. It is a matter of tradition that Brazilian students journey to Portugal to complete their university education. We present the results of a study that seeks to unravel the profound economic and social disparities that persist within Brazilian society and pervade this form of student mobility. Prior to the global economic crisis, meanwhile, it was customary for young Ecuadorians to travel to Spain to finish their studies, but difficult conditions in the Spanish job market have seen the start of new flows of migration to the UK. The study explores this phenomenon, seeking to understand the interaction between families in this change of destination.

- 7 The third section looks at the movement of young people within the EU, with particular regard to Italy and Latvia. In the Italian case, the research looks at the issue of young Italian nationals with a graduate or post-graduate degree who are resident in an EU country other than Italy. This group does not only include those who have migrated recently, but also young people who were born to Italian parents outside Italy and have kept their Italian citizenship. The study highlights the extent to which the EU countries in which these young Italians live are not chosen, in the normal sense. Rather, they reflect a traditional pattern whereby graduates tend to end up in certain countries and manual workers in others. The study presented by the group from Latvia, meanwhile, addresses the motivating factors that lead young Europeans to return to their country of origin. In the case of Latvia, it is revealed that these motivations are primarily linked to a sense of nostalgia for the migrant's homeland, and the urge to be reunited with family.
- 8 Whichever country they depart from, and whichever country they end up in, young migrants exhibit what we might term convergent behaviours. The stimulus to leave is always a powerful one, even if this is often not followed by a clear idea of where to go, or a realistic appraisal of the – often non inconsiderable – difficulties and risks inherent in the process. The principal differentiating factor is the freedom of movement and residence afforded to EU nationals, which represents a cornerstone of European Union citizenship, having been established definitively by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Those who come from countries outside the EU, however, do not enjoy the same rights but, despite the risks, they still set out.
- 9 This issue is edited by Prof. Armando Montanari and Prof. Josefina Domínguez-Mujica, both of whom have vast experience in the area of human mobility research. Armando Montanari was the head of the YMOBILITY project, which covered a range of research areas, including: (i) issues related to the identification and quantification of the principal forms of youth mobility in the EU, and their defining characteristics; (ii) the factors that determine which people engage in processes of human mobility as a strategy of personal and professional development; (iii) analysing individual outcomes in terms of employment, career and job satisfaction; (iv) exploring regional-level outcomes for origin and destination territories in economic, demographic and cultural terms (v) differentiating between short- and long-term outcomes; (vi) implications for migration policies, but also for those relating to education, the economy and housing.
- 10 Josefina Domínguez-Mujica is the president of the IGU GLOBILITY commission, and has a wealth of experience in the development and promotion of public events, research projects and publications looking at the various forms of migration that constitute human mobility. She is also an active, and prominent, member of the population research group of the Association of Spanish Geographers.